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Volume 6 | Number 4 Article 3

10-1951

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Recommended Citation

Buck, Griffith J. (1951) "Easier Winter Care for Roses," *Iowa Farm Science*: Vol. 6 : No. 4 , Article 3.
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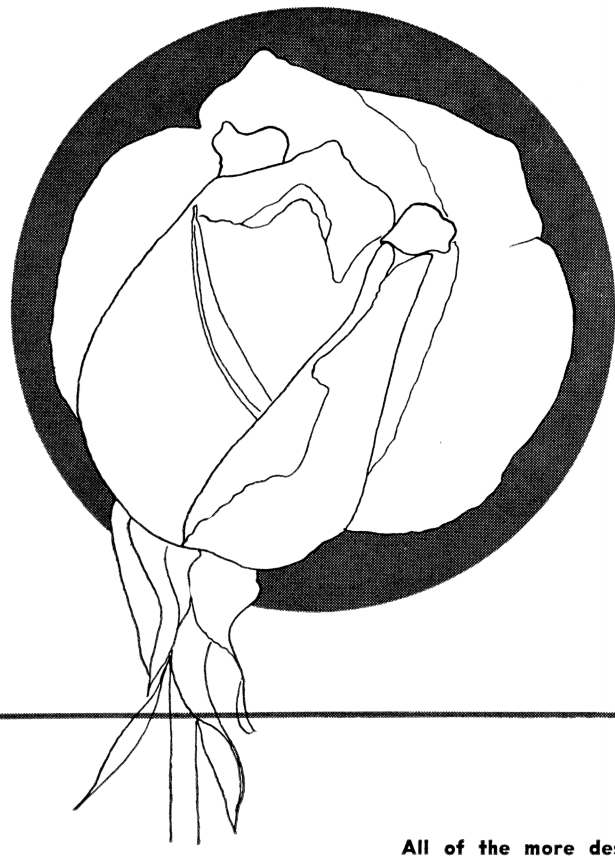

Easier Winter Care For Roses

All of the more desirable roses now grown need some type of winter protection. The old way is time-consuming and laborious. A new way is easier and more effective, too.

by Griffith J. Buck

IN SUMMER, rose growing is a rewarding hobby. However, when winter protection must be applied in the fall and early spring, it takes more effort to reap your rewards. All of the more desirable roses now grown—both bush and climbing varieties—need some type of winter protection to survive and bloom next season.

A deep blanket of snow all winter long is the ideal winter protection. But in cold climates without an all-winter snow cover, you must improvise your own cover—one that approximates a snow cover.

Such a cover should be of good insulating material to conserve what heat is in the soil and to minimize winter temperature fluctuations. And like snow, good winter protection keeps plants dry. Too much moisture around dormant canes provides ideal conditions for the development of rot and mold organisms.

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Standard Method

The old standard method of winter protection for roses in cold climates was developed over a long period of time. You hill or mound the plants with soil to a height of 8 to 10 inches. Then after the soil mound has frozen, you apply a 12- to 18-inch litter mulch. In most winters this method has been satisfactory—especially if a dry, fluffy type of litter such as threshed soybean straw is used.

Unfortunately, this method of winter protection is a laborious and time-consuming process, both in the fall when the mound is made and the litter applied and in the spring when they are removed.

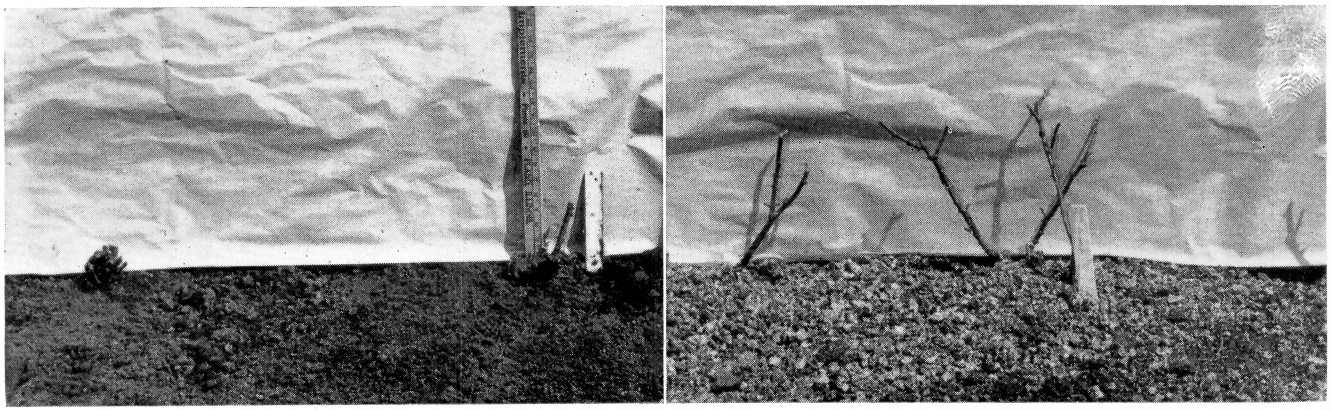
And if the soil must be brought in from outside, it means you have additional problems of supply, transportation and labor.

New, Easier Way

Last fall we began trying to find an effective but easier way of giving roses needed winter protection. We sought a material that in addition to being a good insulator and non-holder of water, would be easily obtained at reasonable cost—something easily applied and removed and, preferably, light in weight. We found that ground corncobs fitted most of these requirements. While ground corncobs do tend to hold water, which reduces insulating value, this disadvantage can be overcome by using waterproof containers.

In our tests here, we used boxes long enough to accommodate four rose plants, spaced 2 feet apart, and allowed 1 foot at each end to permit the ground corncobs to completely surround the plants. The size of the boxes you'll need will depend on the size of your rose beds and on the size of the unit you find most convenient to handle.

We placed the boxes over unpruned plants and filled the boxes to within 2 inches of the top with coarsely-hammermilled dry corncobs. Tops of the plants were bent



Differences between the amount of live wood on plants protected by ground corncobs and those protected by soil plus litter were readily apparent in our tests. Rose on left was protected by the "standard" method; rose on right by ground-corncob method. Both are Numa Fay variety.

over and held in place with a cover of waterproof paper. We found 40-inch-wide Krinklekraft paper suitable for this purpose. The 40-inch width allowed us a 12-inch lap down the sides which covered cracks left when the boxes were assembled. This lap, plus a small amount of soil thrown against the base of the box, kept the contents relatively dry.

This type of covering may be applied after growth has ceased in the fall—but before cold weather has set in. It should be removed as early in the spring as possible. Otherwise, plants will start to leaf prematurely. (In our tests, we applied protection November 9 last year and removed it April 28 last spring.)

Gave Better Results

To test the effectiveness of the new method, we protected an equal number of plants by the standard method, a soil mound plus 12 inches of soybean hay. We tested two varieties of hybrid tea roses, Numa Fay and Contrast. These two varieties were chosen because they tend to be of average hardiness in Iowa. Also, they've figured largely in the parentage of new roses which will be grown in Iowa gardens—varieties which we can expect to be of similar hardiness.

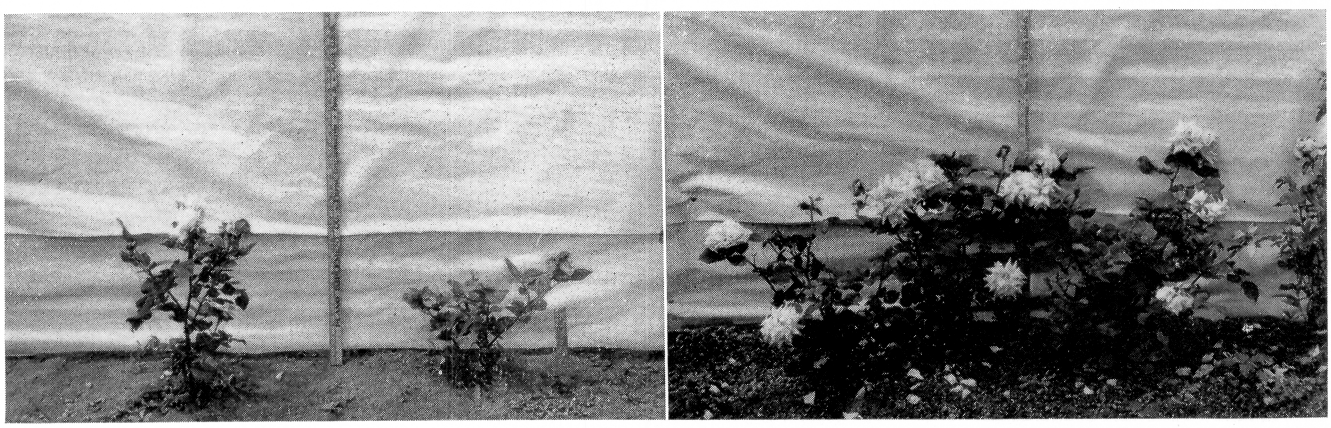
Differences between the amount of live wood on the plants protected by ground corncobs and those protected by soil plus litter were readily apparent when the protection was removed.

With one or two exceptions, plants protected by soil and litter were dead either to the ground line or to the bud union. Corncob-protected plants were alive to an average height of 10 inches. Pruning of both groups was restricted to removal of dead wood.

Contrast between plants protected by the two methods was apparent through the first blooming period. Corncob-protected plants were larger and had more bloom. Too, such desirable bloom qualities as color and petalage, which during the first bloom are largely dependent upon stored food reserves in the canes, were most pronounced in the plants retaining the most live wood (corncob protected).

Costs?

Cost of the corncob method of winter protection the first year will vary with your locality and the type of lumber you use for the boxes. But after the boxes are constructed, they may be used indefinitely. Usefulness of the ground corncobs may be extended by using them to mulch rose beds or other plantings during the summer. But use freshly ground corncobs each fall for winter protection.



Effectiveness of winter protection affects such bloom qualities as color and petalage during the first bloom period. Plant on left was protected by the old soil mound-litter mulch method. Plant on right was protected by ground corncobs. Again, both are Numa Fay variety.